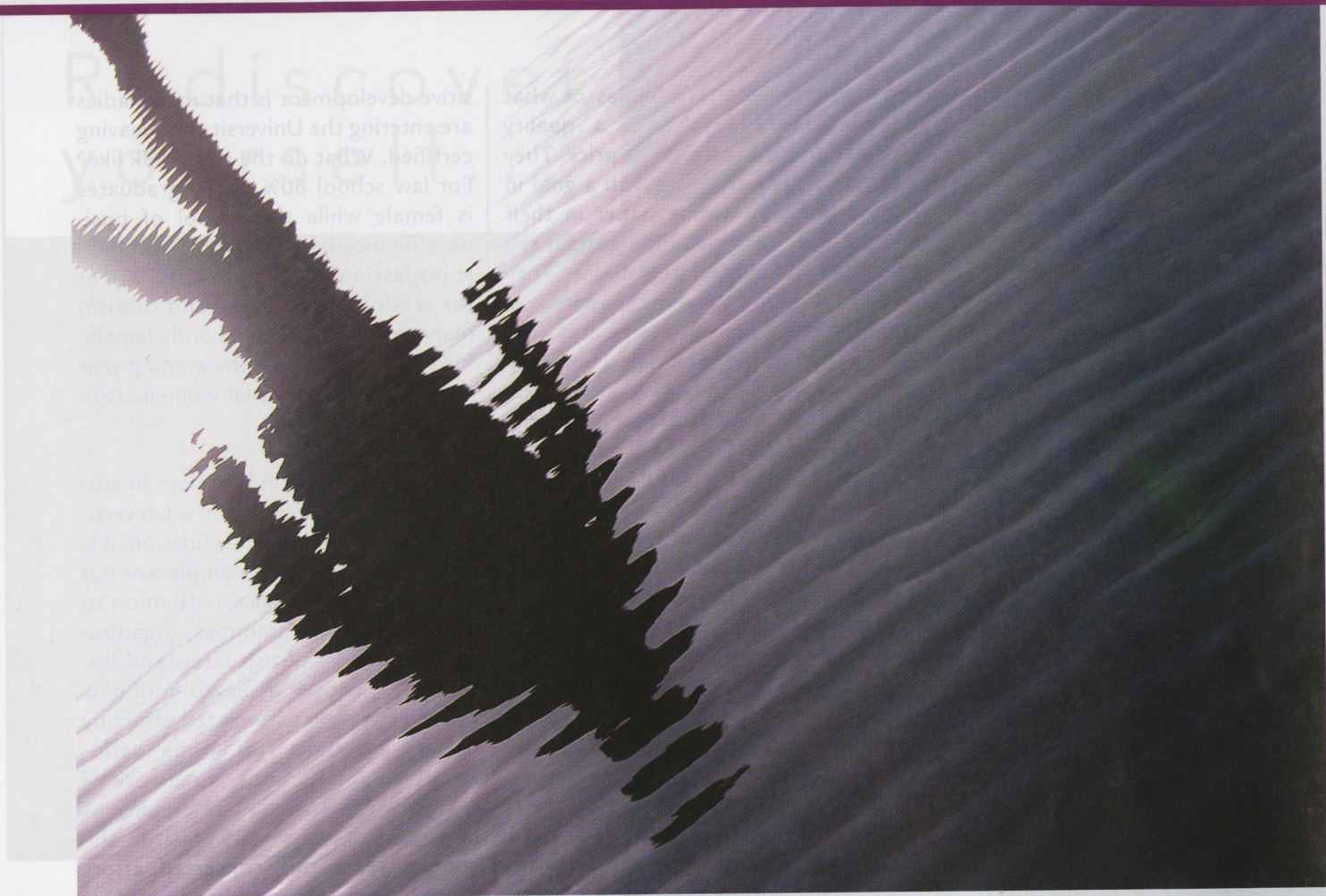




REFLECTIONS ON THE UNIVERSITY OF ARUBA

One cannot miss it. Between the Saint Francis Roman Catholic Church in Oranjestad and the Centro Educativo Cristian stands the University of Aruba. Above the main entrance the words *Huize De La Salle* can be seen. They are silent witnesses to the history of the building. Until 1988 holy men, members of the order of John Baptiste de la Salle, worked, lived and prayed on these premises. Looking for a proper location to house the University of Aruba, the government of the day bought this building. The government believed that having a university, however modest, enhances the image of the country nationally as well as internationally. And without a doubt, having a significant number of well-trained academics would impact the econo-

mic progress of the country positively. By encouraging debate on current issues the University would advance the development of whole community. In September 1988 the secular doors of the University of Aruba opened welcoming the first group of students to the faculty of law. After some years the faculty of business and finance became a reality thus responding to the growing demand. Professionals with an economic/financial background were very much needed in the expanding economy of Aruba. Two years ago the third faculty was added: the school of hospitality and tourism management studies. Aruba, being one of the prime tourist destinations in the region, started training professionals for the industry at the bachelor's level and in near future a master's programme will

follow. Setting up the Center for Life Long Learning (CLL) two years ago was necessary in order to cater to the soaring education needs of professional groups in the community.

As the University prepares to celebrate its twentieth anniversary next year we make use of this opportunity for reflection. What has been achieved until now? Let us say in terms of output. At present there are 155 lawyers who call the University of Aruba their *alma mater*. These graduates are making their mark. They are members of the Aruba Bar Association, they can be found at the Courthouse and the Prosecutor's Office. Several have found employment at different departments of government. The private sector has taken in a few as well.

Some are working on a doctoral thesis at one of the oldest universities in the kingdom. And even the University of Aruba employs four of her former students. The second faculty has over 100 students who left after having been taught the ins and outs of business and finance. At the tax office and in the world of financial consultancy these young people are shaping the field. Just the other day the community was introduced to the first graduates from the newest faculty. They have to find their way on the labor market but this should not be a problem given the strong ties between the industry and the faculty.

Next to their professional input many alumni sit on the board of different foundations thus lending their knowledge and skills for the good of civil society. The graduates of the Uni-



versity are living testimonies of what the University has to offer: a quality education at an affordable price. They came to the institution with a goal in mind and left with a paper in their hand. This notwithstanding the many work and family-related duties. They took the hurdles (exams, papers and presentations) one at a time and were victorious in the end. The University is truly a meritocracy! Wikipedia, the free online encyclopedia defines meritocracy as a system of government or other organization based on demonstrated ability (merit) and talent rather than by wealth (plutocracy), family connections (nepotism), class privilege, popularity (as in a democracy) or other historical determinants of social position and political power. Say no more. Next to the meritocratic principle stands the idea of wide accessibility. Simply put, an elite institution for the fortunate few is not what we had in mind. Based on our modern Continental European tradition, every individual, provided he/she has the capacity, must have the opportunity to enrol in an academic programme. Inscription fee and tuition are kept low and entrance exams are there for those who do not meet the legal entrance requirements. Staying true to this idea is not easy given the fact that some students wrestle with the abstractness of the respective programmes. This may lead to drop-out. On the other hand we must be realistic. Not all individuals are straight A students. Or according to the Aruban grading system not all are straight 9 students. The past years we have been seeing yet another principle being fostered. It is the principle of equality. A significant amount of graduates from the faculty of finance/business were not born in Aruba. In terms of integration this fact must be celebrated. These are the young people who came as children to Aruba with their parents in the wake of the tourism boom in the late eighties/beginning nineties of the last century. They have passed through primary and secondary education and are now availing themselves of the opportunities in higher education. Another po-

sitive development is that many ladies are entering the University and leaving certified. What do the stats look like? For law school 60% of the graduates is female while the school of business/finance has delivered 70% female professionals. The class of 2007 of the school of hospitality and tourism management is predominantly female. Inscription forms for the coming year at this faculty show that women are in the lead.

What does the future have in store? After years of growth the University needs a period of consolidation. It is not a time to become complacent but a period to pay *additional* attention to the quality of programmes, organization structures, infrastructure and staff. What has been achieved until now are the fruits of a concerted effort by the the government of Aruba, various professional groups, a network of sister institutions, the community at large and the University staff. In the coming years this concerted effort must be taken to another level. During a process of consolidation critical input from outside the institution is most welcome as it aids the University in her endeavors. Consolidation sets the stage for future growth; it enables the many individuals who work at the institution to recharge and prepare for that next level. Overcome by a sense of gratitude and pride we say thanks to all those individuals who have played a role in the life of the University community for the past two decades: members of the board of trustees, rectors, deans, lecturers, library staff, administrative and financial team, janitorial staff. Thanks for unselfishly going the extra mile in building communities of excellence. 

**Celcio Luciano Milliard (1971) was born in Aruba. After graduating from secondary school in Groningen, the Netherlands, he left for Port-au-Prince, Haiti where he worked as a teacher of Modern American English at the Universite Adventiste d'Haiti. After he returned to Europe he studied law at the University of Maastricht and the University of Westminster at London. At the University of Groningen he lectured constitutional law and initiated a doctoral thesis. Since 2002 he is employed by the University of Aruba where he teaches constitutional, administrative and international law.*